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Bojana Radovanović

Avant-Garde Echoes in the Neither/Nor State. A Musicologist's View on the Dissemination of Avant-Garde Movements

Conference abstract published on: <https://ymmeastwest.wordpress.com/2018/11/04/avant-garde-echoes-in-the-neither-nor-state-a-musicologists-view-on-the-dissemination-of-avant-garde-movements/>, November 4, 2018.

This paper deals with the reception of European avant-garde in the Serbian/Yugoslav context of the 20th century, scrutinized in the highly influential study by Serbian musicologist Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, "Creative Presence of European Avant-Garde with Us" [Stvaralačka prisutnost evropske avangarde u nas] (1983). While dealing with the musical reception of the avant-garde between the wars and during the sixties and the seventies, Veselinović-Hofman creates a musicological narrative through which we can observe several problematic knots regarding the model of center and periphery.

One of the knots is tangled around the specificity of the Yugoslav position after World War II, which is wittily described by musicologist Vesna Mikić with a twist on the Slavic antithesis, a famous stylistic figure in epic poetry from the Balkans. Mikić's "Yugoslavic antithesis" introduces the neither/nor qualification concerning the geopolitics (neither East nor West), some national issues such as language (neither Serbian nor Croatian), and everyday life practices (neither socialism nor capitalism), which will here be utilized as a constant reminder of the circumstances concerning the construction of the avant-garde in Serbian/Yugoslavian music historiography. Through this qualification, as well as the critical examination of the center-periphery model, I will look into the construction of one rather influential and potent musicological narrative.

Having in mind the specifics of the Yugoslav geopolitical position, as well as the nature and inner laws of the avant-garde movements, Veselinović-Hofman does not problematize the issue of the avant-garde with the polarization of the East and the West in mind; instead, she offers a view on the European avant-garde impulse spreading in local contexts, with a careful examination of the local political and social situation. Like an echo or a stone thrown into the water, the avant-garde momentum loses its force and impact with every new concentric circle it reaches. Thus arises a particular situation which had led to a creation of a narrative that differentiates European and local avant-garde, which will here be presented.